Right: the D-18. one of the early aircraft used to transport material to the Nevada Test Site.

Below: the famous AMI.

Airplanes and the Lab

For over 30 years, employees relied on Lab-supplied airplanes for transport to and from the Nevada Test Site.

Many early timers remember the D-18 that the Lab initially used for transporting personnel and classified and hazardous materials to and from NTS. Air travel increased to the point that another plane, a C-47 (DC3) was contracted for use in 1962 and a second one was added in 1963. Because the C-47 was not pressurized, it was limited to an altitude of 10,000 feet.

Roger Brown, who spent many days at the Nevada Test Site, remembers the DC3s well. Flights were smooth over the airport, but flying over the deserts could be quite exciting because of the volatile weather patterns. “One day, the British and I were coming back from the site. It was the afternoon, and we had come over the Sierras. Then all of a sudden, whammo! Pencils flew straight up out of our pockets, and some of us came very close to hitting our heads on the ceiling. One of the crew came out and calmly commented, ‘Well, now you know why we want you to keep your seat belts on.’”

But most Lab employees remember one specific plane used by the Lab from 1968 until 1994. Pressurized for 8,000 feet inside the cabin and able to cruise at 25,000 feet, the plane was a Fairchild F-27 purchased by DOE for Lab use and affectionately known as AMI, for Aviation Management, Inc. AMI was originally designed for “Executives and Board of Directors transportation,” configured for 14 passengers, and outfitted with plush leather chairs, galley, bar, and other amenities. Once the Lab bought it, however, the plane was promptly parked and refurbished. Twelve weeks later, AMI rolled out with larger engines, no-nonsense interiors, and seating for 40.

Through its many years of service, AMI reliably carried approximately 7,000 passengers per year between the Nevada Test Site and Livermore.

Information on airplane history generously supplied by Charlie Blue, Roger Brown, and Joe Behne.

Dressing for the Occasion

Fred Holzer

Holzer recounts a historic meeting in the Soviet Union that was not without its humorous moments.

In early 1969, the Soviet Union proposed that technical exchanges take place between U.S. and Russian scientists engaged in their respective Peaceful Nuclear Explosion programs. The U.S. accepted, and the first meeting was held in Vienna, Austria, in April 1969. To my knowledge, it was the first time nuclear explosion effects and experiments were discussed between U.S. and Soviet experts. All U.S. scientists were from Livermore: Roger Batzel, then Associate Director (AD) for Chemistry and Biomedical Research; Glenn Werth, AD for Plowshare, and myself, Deputy K Division leader.

We presented results of our experiments, including those from the December 1967 gas stimulation experiment Gasbuggy. The Russians showed features of their water storage reservoir, formed by a nuclear crater. I'm sure we caused quite a stir when we asked for copies of their photographs, but we did get them the next day.

The 1970 Moscow consortium, complete with Eddie Bauer uniforms.
Front row, L-R: Soviet interpreter, Fred Holzer, John Kelley (AEC), Colonel Rosen, Tommy Tompson (AEC Commissioner and Head of U.S. Delegation).
2nd row, L-R: Todd Crawford, U.S. interpreter, Nelson Seivering, Glenn Werth, Roger Batzel.
Back row, L-R: Ed Strukness, Dean Thornbrough.

We found it interesting that whenever the Russians showed plots of parameters versus yield, they always used U.S. unclassified data.

The second meeting took place in Moscow in February 1970. The Livermore contingent consisted again of Roger Batzel, Glenn Werth, myself, plus Todd Crawford, an atmospheric scientist. When we heard about going to Moscow, we from Livermore protested that we were not equipped for winter weather in Russia. So, the Atomic Energy Commission bought us light-tan winter coats, hats, and gloves from Eddie Bauer, but we had to return them when we came home. In Moscow, we were all dressed alike in our Eddie Bauer uniforms.

We met in a small conference room in the State Committee on Atomic Energy building. After all of us were introduced and the first speaker was ready to begin, Kedrovskiy, the head of the Soviet delegation, raised his hand and said, "Wait! We must begin with a joke! Man who is bald in front, great thinker. Man who is bald in back, great lover. Man who is bald in front and back, thinks he is a great lover!" The humor was that both Kedrovskiy and Tommy Tompson, the AEC commissioner who headed our group, were almost totally bald.

We encountered a number of difficulties—more annoying than serious. Often our translator had to correct their interpreters. It was some time before we realized that when the Russians talked about a project, they were referring to what we would call a concept or proposal. But talks proceeded in a cordial and professional manner. We learned of the Soviet use of a nuclear explosive to squeeze off a gas well that was out of control and on fire. The competence of the Russian scientists was obviously quite high.

A real rapport was established between many of the American and Russian scientists. A third meeting began in Washington and ended at the Nevada Test Site. While in Washington, we gave the Russians souvenir Frisbees with the Lab's logo in their center. We used hallways in the State Department building to show the Russians how to throw them, much to the consternation of other building occupants.